

December 12, 2023
Special Meeting
5:00 p.m.

The Board of Directors of the San Benito County Water District convened in special session on December 12, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. at the San Benito County Water District office at 30 Mansfield Road, Hollister, California. Members present were: President Sonny Flores, Vice President Andrew Shelton and Directors Joe Tonascia, Doug Williams and Mark Wright. Also present were General Manager Steve Wittry, District Counsel Jeremy T. Liem, Deputy District Engineer Rob Hillebrecht, Senior Engineer David Macdonald, Operations and Maintenance Supervisor Michael Craig, Water Conservation Program Manager Shawn Novack, Office Specialist I Jennifer Cosio Arellano and Executive Assistant/Board Clerk Barbara Mauro.

CALL TO ORDER

President Flores called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

a. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

President Flores led the Pledge of Allegiance.

b. Roll Call

Mrs. Mauro called roll; members present were: President Flores, Vice President Shelton and Directors Tonascia, Williams and Wright.

c. Speakers will be limited to 5 minutes to address the Board

There were no members of the public who wished to speak.

AGENDA ITEMS:

1. Status of Hernandez Reservoir Operations

Mr. Wittry reported he, Mr. Hillebrecht and Mr. Macdonald went to Hernandez Reservoir yesterday, to survey the reservoir and spillway and took photos. He has provided some data from Hernandez Reservoir levels from 2010 to the present. Using a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Wittry described the photos taken at the reservoir.

The first photo is from Clear Creek. The second photo is from the concrete bridge, which shows a ten-foot-wide flow. Director Wright asked if it has run like this all year. Mr. Wittry stated no, about 8 weeks ago, there wasn't any flow there. Currently, there is a lot of water coming through the canyon. The third photo is the outflow from the dam at approximately 5cfs (cubic feet per second); it was at 85 cfs when it was running to empty the reservoir. The fourth photo is a view of the spillway with most of the debris removed. Staff has also done some repair work on the top of the spillway. Mr. Craig described the depth of the water on either side of the outlet structure, which is 8-10 feet deep. The photos also showed staff has set siphons to assist in emptying the water. Mr. Craig stated that perhaps something got through the grate and is possibly stuck in the valve. In 2002, Mr. Craig recalled that staff accessed the valve chamber by crawling through the dam outlet pipeline to the valve. Due to the modifications to the outlet chamber, it is too difficult to divert water away from the access ladder. The ladder is the only way to access the valves to attempt to manually operate them.

Director Tonascia asked if these are 30-inch valves; Mr. Wittry confirmed this. Director Wright asked about the work area and why there is water where staff needs to work. Mr. Wittry stated it is due to the elevation of the outlet structure, which is fifty feet above the valve chamber. Discussion ensued about the use of a booster pump and how difficult it would be to pump the water out. Mr. Wittry reported water is seeping in from the hillside around the reservoir. He further reported in its current condition, it is too dangerous to send anyone down to work on it. Mr. Wittry asked the Board if they wanted staff to continue to expend funds on options now or wait until after the rainy season? He then walked through how the District has operated Hernandez in the past and reviewed the handout from 2009-current.

Director Tonascia stated in a drought situation, the District tries to get water from Hernandez down to the San Benito River.

Director Williams expressed concern flooding could occur this year during the rainy season.

Director Tonascia stated because of the water coming from Hernandez, District customers would be unable to fix the channel on their properties due to the encroachment of the water and could possibly lose parts of their property. He asked about options such as renting equipment from Rain for Rent or hiring a diver.

Mr. Wittry stated hiring a diver could be \$600/hour or more. However, presently, it is unsafe for anyone to attempt to access the valves. Director Tonascia inquired if staff explored all options. Mr. Wittry stated staff did not check into the option of renting equipment.

Director Wright had thought it was supposed to be drawn down enough for someone from District staff to enter to look at the valves by mid-November.

Mr. Craig stated it is a vast area. In 2017, when the valve broke, it sheared off the hydraulic hose.

President Flores asked how much would it need to drop? Mr. Hillebrecht stated 20-30 acre-feet without any inflow. Mr. Wittry stated it is staff's recommendation to wait. He further asked what level the Board is comfortable spending to work on the issue. Mr. Wittry stated it would likely be a six-figure amount if the District were to hire additional staff such as a diver and equipment.

Director Wright said the figures given by staff must have been incorrect, as it was estimated the area would be drained by sometime in November, so staff could get in and assess the situation with the valves. He also asked why a pump wouldn't buy some time to allow someone to get in safely. Mr. Wittry stated that water continued to drain from the saturated soil surrounding the reservoir and it is unlikely staff could change the rams this season.

Director Tonascia stated he didn't feel staff had any sense of urgency. Director Williams asked if the District could rent equipment from Rain for Rent. Mr. Wittry stated the challenge is getting the equipment to the site due to how remote the area is. He stated that historically the District has not utilized pumping equipment at Hernandez. He further discussed that if the valve was to break, it is in a $\frac{3}{4}$ open position and its the best position possible to get us through the rainy season. Water will be metered out by the valve, however we will not be able to retain any water for percolation from Hernandez this year.

Director Williams said Zone 3 had approximately \$1 million a year in revenue; why can't the District use these funds for necessary repairs at the spillway and at the canal.

Director Tonascia asked Mr. Craig if the parts needed at the spillway were ordered last year. Mr. Craig stated the parts were ordered in 2022 and are ready to be installed. Mr. Craig added previous staff welded the valves over a period of time rather than replacing the valves.

Mr. Wittry stated this was discussed in the committee meeting about operational use and needing a plan to repair and maintain the equipment.

President Flores stated staff should continue to monitor the situation and when they can safely get into where the valves are, see about operating the valve. It appears the Board is looking for more action to be taken. Mr. Wittry stated, if that is the wish of the Board, he can spend up to \$30,000 without Board approval Mr. Liem confirmed this statement. Discussion ensued about whether something should already have been done and all options should have been evaluated. Mr. Wittry further stated the access road has been regraded, improved the access and an outside firm has repaired 17 culverts around the end of July. Director Tonascia said there was no sense of urgency and Mr. Wittry stated it is unfair to say staff hasn't done enough.

Vice President Shelton asked how much time is needed to close the valve. Mr. Craig stated if they could safely get in there, perhaps 30 minutes. Mr. Hillebrecht added, the valve can't be kept closed because with rain coming, they would have no way to open it again and that could create other problems.

President Flores asked how much time is needed to change the ram. Mr. Craig said that is a more difficult answer, as it is more complicated. There would have to be no water in where the valves are, as welding is likely necessary, and Mr. Craig estimates about a week.

Director Williams asked if the water is coming from Clear Creek? Mr. Hillebrecht stated yes, but that is not the only location water is seeping in from. Also, Mr. Hillebrecht added the location is so remote, it is 2 hours from the office one way, so it is also a logistical problem as well. Director Wright stated the District should hire an outside company to do this work.

Mr. Wittry stated Directors Williams and Tonascia mentioned operational maintenance, which has been “kicked down the road” for a while now. This kind of issue will continue to happen at district facilities if meaningful repairs are not made. Mr. Wittry offered to check what funds are available in the Zone 3 budget.

President Flores asked staff to keep this as a priority and hire additional staff or an outside firm to assist with this work as necessary.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 6:16 p.m.

Minutes were approved at the January 8, 2024 Board meeting and signed by the presiding board member.

/s/Andrew Shelton
Andrew Shelton, President

/s/Barbara L. Mauro
Barbara L. Mauro, Executive Assistant/Board Clerk